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## Campus Policing: A Time to Change the Field Training Officer Program

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# ABSTRACT

The Field Training Officer (FTO) program is perhaps the most essential component of a patrol officer's practical training and skills development in most Texas police departments. Police academies may provide the basic rote knowledge and concepts of police work, but it is the field training that provides officers with the real-world situations and experiences that officers will use in their daily activities. This paper will examine and discuss the two predominate FTO programs in use by today's law enforcement agencies: the Reno Police Training Model and San José Field Training Model.

The San José Field Training Model was revolutionary when first introduced and has set the standard for more than 40 years, but as this paper will establish, contemporary community oriented policing has created a need for change to this style of field training. The Reno Field Training Model has emerged as a progressive program specifically designed to empower new recruits to develop options and select the best choices while being coached by an experienced trainer. Empowerment enables officers to acquire confidence, think independently, and make decisions without relying on supervisors for guidance. The Reno Model promotes a philosophical change toward collaboration between trainee and trainer instead of the traditional San José Model of tell and evaluate. A Reno Model fills the prescription needed to cure what ails the antiquated field training program.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

Field training officer programs serve as the nexus that fills the gap that normally exists between concepts and reality. Police academy graduates quickly find themselves saturated with real world police encounters devoid of the clinical classroom environment. Academies provide basic training, policing theory, and hypothetical application scenarios. For new officers, a gap exists between theoretical classroom learning and practical application of the newly learned skills. This learning transition period is called the field training officer program. A contemporary field training officer program, the Reno Model, has emerged to provide street training for newly acquired officers (Clark, 2002).

The police academy is the law enforcements equivalent to military basic training; it strips the recruit's individualism and builds on a teamwork foundation. The academy provides new recruits with classroom instruction on the background, basic skills, concepts, and competencies requirements for the job, but a chasm often occurs between what is learned in the classroom and what really takes place on the streets. For an officer to become successful, the department must implement a program that transitions the officer from what is learned in the classroom to the practical application of police work in the field.

In Texas, the Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) has mandated this void be filled by the Field Training Officer (FTO) Program. Police officers must complete a FTO period to receive a basic peace officers certificate required to work for the department without a trainer or constant supervision. The FTO program not only meets the state requirement, it also serves as the critical

nexus for newly appointed police officers to gain the hands-on experiences and competencies that can only be learned in the day-to-day environment while on the job. Clark (2002) emphasized the FTO program's transitory role's importance by saying, “The field training program allows the officer to experience first-hand what has previously been only read or seen in the classroom. The effective field training program takes over where the classroom leaves off” (p. 1). The FTO program follows a simple on-job-training format, where a police officer who has graduated from a police academy or who has been hired on from another department will serve under an experienced, proficient field training officer who will train, observe, and evaluate the police officer trainee.

As styles of policing changed, such as community oriented policing, a new series of problems emerged. Contemporary departments that embrace the community oriented policing concept find it hard to break from traditional training modes and continue to use FTO models that pre-date the new policing style. The conflict between what is taught in the police academies and during field training and what actually takes place during community oriented policing raises concerns that a gap has once again formed between what is taught in the academy and what is actually needed on the job. The coordinator that must bridge the gap is the field training officer.

To be a field training officer, the officer must be certified by TCLEOSE after attending a 40-hour FTO Trainers Course, in addition to possessing experience and proficiency in the trade. An officer must have a minimum of two years experience as a Texas peace officer to attend the certification course (TMPA, n.d.). During the process,

the FTO must provide demonstration and performance training which result in daily observation and evaluation of the trainee's day-to-day activities and performance.

It is preferred to expose trainees to a variety of FTOs and shifts for the benefit of the trainee, but this is not always possible. Larger departments may have an opportunity to assign trainees to multiple FTOs across various shifts, but smaller departments usually limit assignment to one or two FTOs on the shift the trainee will eventually be assigned permanent duty. The limited exposure to FTOs can result in failing the trainee due to a single subjective opinion of the FTO. Multiple FTOs on different shifts provides the trainee with various training opportunities and less chance of personal conflict bias. The trainee typically receives training in the areas of: department policies and procedures, report writing, officer safety, vehicle operation, arrests, traffic stops, criminal investigations, and situations officers routinely encounter while on the job. The two models or variation of models most commonly used are the San José and Reno Models.

## POSITION

Contemporary departments are moving away from the reactive approach of responding to calls and taking on a more proactive approach of finding long-term solutions to problems within the community. Community oriented policing requires officers to use a variety of techniques to prevent crime from occurring opposed to enforcing law after the fact. For instance, during a domestic disturbance call, the San José Model would require officers to make an arrest as a result of being called to the scene, while a community policing response may be to arrange for a clergy member to make the scene and mediate the dispute so no one goes to jail for the night. The long-

term solution would be intervention and counseling versus the short-term arrest, anger, repeat cycle.

The Reno Model, developed by the Hoover Group, is a contemporary alternative field training model specifically designed to thrive in a community policing environment. Herman Goldstein, James Q. Wilson, and George L. Kelling pioneered community oriented policing as a policing style and philosophy. This new era of policing was not addressed in previous FTO programs.

Department leaders and FTOs recognized a need to incorporate community policing in existing field training programs. Most efforts resulted in a modified San José Model with an additional behavioral item labeled Community Policing. No specific evaluation criteria existed to determine if an officer met or failed to meet the minimum standard. Most FTOs referred to Community Policing as the officer friendly block. Not until 2001 did a solution to the training problem emerge. A collaborative effort between the Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services (C.O.P.S.), Police Executive Research Forum (P.E.R.F.), and Reno Police Department developed the Reno Model (Walker, 2005).

The most significant difference between the two models is that the Reno Model relies on solving community problems through proactive problem solving. The Reno Model uses a police training officer (PTO) who employs problem based learning techniques based on adult learning methods. Problem based learning has been around since the 1970s. James Rheem (1998) described problem based learning as, “An instructional strategy in which students confront contextualized, ill-structured problems and strive to find meaningful solutions” (p. 1). Very few law enforcement incidents have

a black or white solution. These ill-structured situations require officers to formulate future solutions based on the best information available at the time. As the situation changes, so will the prescribed solution.

Hoover (2002) cited critical thinking is the basis for the Reno Model; it requires officers to: encounter and define the problem, determine what resources are needed to resolve the problem, and construct final solution and begin implementation. A unique feature of the Reno Model is the concept of failing forward. This means if a trainee fails but learns from the failure and devises another plan of action to compensate for the failure, then the trainee has not washed out of the PTO program.

Another significant feature of Reno models is the arrangement of the primary training areas. The Reno Model uses one set of four Substantive Topics and one set 15 Core Competencies. Substantive Topics is the list of most common police activities, and Core Competencies is a list of activities normally encountered during a tour of duty. Hoover (2002) developed the core competencies based on a survey of over 400 law enforcement agencies to determine what activities were applicable to officers working the beat in a community oriented environment. This survey allowed the agencies that would be the recipients of program to have direct input on what was needed.

To minimize the reliance of documentation solely for termination, the Reno Model dispenses with the daily observation report and opts to use a daily journal to record events that occur during a trainee's tour of duty; it leans less on evaluation and more toward learning. The journal does not serve as an evaluation tool; its purpose is to record whether learning opportunities have or have not occurred during the shift. The Reno Model also implements four End-of-Phase-Evaluations, one Mid-term Evaluation,

and one Final Evaluation, which significantly reduces the arduous task of continuous evaluation (Hoover, 2002).

The final steps to completing the Reno Model training program involves the processes of the weekly coaching and training reviews and neighborhood portfolio exercises. The weekly reviews serve as a team-building exercise and collaborative effort between PTO and officer. It documents an event selected by both officers and reviews how the incident fit into the core competencies. It provides the trainee with an opportunity to apply critical thinking skills and affords the PTO an opportunity to discuss events and scenarios in a non-attribution environment. The portfolio exercise covers the entire field training period and is designed to culminate with a presentation to the chief or the chief's designate. The exercise helps the trainee explore the community and get to know the community leadership, who the trainee will ultimately partner with to solve community policing problems.

## COUNTER POSITION

The first known FTO program was developed in more than 40 years ago as a collaborative effort between Chief Robert Allen, San José Police Department and Dr. Michael Roberts, PhD, psychologist. Originally called the Meld Training Officer Program, it was changed to the San José Model, Field Training Officer Program. The aging San Jose Model exhibits three distinct shortfalls: its inability to adapt to the changing philosophy of policing and updated training methods; its significant focus on law enforcement organizations choosing to protect themselves from failure-to-train lawsuits stemming from police training issues; and its over concern with documentation (Walker, 2005). Conversely, the Reno Model relies on problem-solving that

incorporates flexibility to adjust to changing policing and training policies; it focuses on individual responsibility, which de-emphasizes the department's legal liabilities; and it streamlines the department's training documentation, while increasing trainee's responsibility to maintain training journal.

Just by asking, one would find that the traditional FTO program used by a majority of Texas law enforcement agencies was developed nearly 40 years ago. A common response to modifying or updating the program was, "If it works, why fix it." These traditional programs have served and, in some instances, continue to fill the void between the classroom and the street. Haberfield (2002) made the following comparisons with academies and the FTO programs: “Academy training can illustrate how things are supposed to be; an effective FTO program can demonstrate how things are” (p. 80). The traditional FTO program assigns a new officer to an experienced officer or officers for a set period of time. If it is an academy graduate or a relatively inexperienced trainee, the new trainee usually completes the program as designed. If the trainee has or demonstrates experience and proficiency, the training can last from a minimum of four weeks to beyond 20 weeks (Kaminski, 2002).

The San José Model uses 31 specific behavioral traits that describe the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful police officer. This enables departments, for the first time, to distinguish performance between officers who could and could not meet minimum performance standards. The measuring tools were called Daily Observation Reports and the Weekly Observation Summaries. The forms listed the 31-one traits and used a 7-point, Likert anchoring scale. The forms list Unacceptable, as 1 on a scale; Acceptable as 4 on a scale; and Superior as 7 on a

scale for each of the 31 areas listed. In addition, a description of the rating was developed to facilitate standardization for FTOs conducting training. The descriptions evolved into a Standardized Evaluation Guide. Evaluation became a critical element of the program, so the program became known as the Field Training and Evaluation Program (Moore & Womack, 1975).

Since 1975, little has changed with implementation of the model. The model, considered revolutionary for its time, is still the program of choice among most police departments. 2002 estimates indicated that 74% of U.S. police departments used the San José model (Kaminski, 2002). Proponents of the San José Model prefer to use a time-tested method opposed to implementing a model under construction. The Reno Model application of adult learning methodology serves as the building block for its learning philosophy. It is possible for the standard field training model, the San Jose Model, to incorporate adult learning practices, but it is primarily designed as behavior modification training program. The Reno and San Jose Models share common training goals, but the Reno Model is not a revision of the earlier model. The Reno Model recognizes that each officer possesses unique learn styles and abilities. Until the advent of the Reno Model, field training officer programs focused on reactive response instead of problem-solving and proactive prevention policing (Hoover, 2006).

Hoover (2002) acknowledged that the San José Model has satisfied law enforcement's training in the past, but the advent of the community policing philosophy has left the San José Model antiquated and in need of a completely different training model. The San José Model provides a set of circumstances where the trainee must react with a pre-planned response. The San José Model does not allow room for the

officer to think for him or herself, but rather implement hard fast instructions learned during field training. This reliance of by-the-number learning also makes the new officer co-dependent on the FTO when the officer encounters situations not covered during training. The San José Model does not provide new officers with the tools to synthesize solutions to problems that are independent of their training. Since the San José Model has remained unchanged, essentially, departments using the community policing philosophy are asking officers trained on an outdated program to engage community law enforcement problems with problem solving techniques for which they have no practical experience noted Hoover (2002). Some departments that continue to use the San José Model attempt to correct the community policing deficit as aftermarket training at the end of the FTO cycle as a separate training item. This is the same as telling the trainee to forget everything he or she has just learned or to forget what they are about to be taught.

The San José Model assigns significant weight for providing training as a shield against civil liability and wrongful termination. Several successful high-profile 'failure-to-train' lawsuits have caused departments to react by stringent training procedures. These lawsuits are rooted in Title 42 § 1983, its remedies for violating federally protected constitutional rights, and Supreme Court decisions dealing with deliberate indifference, the reckless disregard of the consequences of one's acts, or omissions. In *Johnson v. Cincinnati*, the courts determined for a department to be liable for failure-to-train under Title 42 § 1983, the plaintiff must prove the training program is inadequate for the job, the inadequacy results from the department's deliberate indifference, and the inadequacy is the proximate cause of injury to the plaintiff (Walker, 2005). Kaminski

(2002) pointed out that successful lawsuits resulted from a historic pattern of training deficiencies. These suits have only resulted in less than 4% against departments. It makes sense that if a department designs a training program geared to improve officers' performance, skill, and competency; the less susceptible the department would be to failure-to-train lawsuits. Regardless of the training model used, there is no substitute for sound administrative leadership and a quality training program to shield a department from lawsuits. In the words of Hoover (2002), “It is not necessarily the type of training model an agency chooses that reduces liability, but rather the method by which the training is applied and guidelines adhered to that make the difference” (p. 5).

The San José Model relies on administratively intensive documentation by nature. The San José Model is a good example of what happens when the process becomes more important than the event. The purpose or event should revolve around training the new officer; instead, it has become more critical to document the training than conduct the training. Documentation serves as a critical tool for leaders to make decisions on training, retaining, and termination; the FTO program should not be a byproduct of the process. Some field training programs have degraded into a sink or swim process with little training, a lot of evaluation, and heavy on the documentation. The thought process, once again, focuses on department liability for wrongful termination. The paper trail is designed to document the trainee's shortcomings to justify termination. It would make more sense from an economic perspective to use the process to determine shortfalls with the program, processes, and substandard behaviors that attributed to the unsatisfactory performance. Leaders who rely heavily on the documents instead of the results find themselves more concerned with reading

the reports than evaluating the FTO, trainee, and program for improvement. The strict application of the San José Model tends to promote over-concern for documentation (Walker, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

The police academy is the law enforcements equivalent to military basic training; it strips the recruit's individualism and builds on a teamwork foundation. The academy provides new recruits with classroom instruction on the background, basic skills, concepts, and competencies requirements for the job, but a chasm often occurs between what is learned in the classroom and what really takes place on the streets. The traditional San José FTO program used by a majority of Texas law enforcement agencies was developed nearly 40 years ago. The model, by its name, Field Training and Evaluation Program, constructs barriers between the FTO and the trainee. The trainee must take an on-guard posture every moment of duty while in the FTO presence. This environment reduces the free exchange of ideas if the trainee is reluctant to disclose he or she is confused or does not understand what is being taught. This does not facilitate forming relationships with the community or community leaders. In some instances, it may even encourage a sense of the 'us against them' environment, which is diametrically the opposite of community policing. Agencies continue to use the San José Model out of habit. A common response to modifying or updating the program is the mantra, "If it works, why fix it."

Critics of the San José Model think it does not measure up to community oriented policing philosophy. It fails to allow room for the officer to think for him or herself, but rather implement hard fast instructions learned during field training. The San José

Model depicts a good example of what happens when the process becomes more important than the event by promoting an over-concern for documentation.

The Reno Model, developed by the Hoover Group, is a contemporary alternative field training model specifically designed to thrive in a community policing environment. It was born as a collaborative effort between the Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services, Police Executive Research Forum, and Reno Police Department in 2001. The Reno Model uses a Police Training Officer who employs problem based learning techniques based on proven adult learning methods. The model uses one set of four Substantive Topics, the most common police activities, and one set 15 Core Competencies, the activities normally encountered during a tour of duty. It dispenses with the Daily Observation Report and uses a Journal to record events that occur during a trainee's tour of duty instead of evaluating the performance on a daily basis which reduces documentation. The weekly training and coaching report promotes teamwork between trainer and trainee. Perhaps the greatest benefit to implementing the Reno Model focuses on neighborhood portfolio exercises designed to integrate the trainee into the community as an independent, proactive officer.

Based on the evidence presented, a significant disparity exists between the San Jose Model and the new era of community policing. The Reno Model excels in the areas of: changing the philosophy of policing, updating training methods, and reducing superfluous documentation. It is time to move field training out of the 20th century and implement the Reno Field Training Model.

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